

SENATE FINANCE & CLAIMS

Exhibit No. 8

Date 3-24-11

Bill No. SB 414  
March 23, 2011

Dear Chairman Lewis and members of Montana's Senate Finance and Claims Committee,

I am writing to urge you to oppose **SB 414** in committee this Thursday.

At a time when the federal government is about to delist wolves in Montana and Idaho, Senator Vincent's bill would undermine Montana's federally-approved wolf management plan and thereby jeopardize the best chance Montana has for state control over wolves.

SB 414 would allow wolves to be killed on private land at any time without a license, once wolves have been delisted. This essentially creates a system of dual classification of wolves in Montana, whereby wolves are managed as a game animal on public land, but treated as a predator animal on private land, with unregulated, unlicensed killing. Wyoming has already gone down this path, and it has gotten them nowhere, while holding up delisting here in Montana.

SB 414 also violates, in letter and in spirit, the central tenets of the much-heralded, sportsman's North American Model of Wildlife Conservation that requires:

- Equal hunting opportunity for all, regardless of land ownership;
- Well-regulated, licensed hunting with seasons, harvest limits and penalties;
- The use of science and monitoring to ensure wildlife resources are held in the public trust for future generations.

As such, no ethical sportsman would support SB 414.

Clearly, wolves are becoming everyone's favorite scapegoat this session. Wild accusations of the "decimation" of elk herds are just that. In fact, with the exception of a few herds, elk are doing quite well. Statewide elk population numbers are UP 60 percent since wolves were reintroduced in 1995, according to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. Furthermore, according to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks most recent elk counts, 80 percent of hunting districts in Montana (and even 76 percent of those districts in wolf country) are at or above population objective. And hunter success is as high as ever. (Please see the attached fact sheet on elk & wolves for more cited data on that.)

And yes, wolves occasionally snack on livestock, but livestock loss to wolves is a small fraction of livestock loss overall—domestic dogs, disease and winter storms kill many times more livestock than wolves do.

Montana's wolf management plan was put together thoughtfully, and after much citizen input from all stakeholders. It has already received USFWS approval, and has been held up as a model for other states. For years, Wyoming has been holding up the show on wolf delisting—Montana should not join our southern neighbors, but by gutting Montana's wolf management plan, that's exactly the path that SB 414 would send us down.

The return of the gray wolf to the Northern Rockies is a remarkable achievement in wildlife restoration and an Endangered Species Act success story. I want to see Montana succeed at managing wolves in way that preserves this piece of our unique wildlife heritage for future generations. Upholding Montana's wolf management plan is central to that effort, so please oppose SB 414.

I apologize that I am unable to attend Thursday's hearing in person, but please let me know if I can supply any other information that might be helpful to the committee.

Respectfully,

Derek Goldman, Field Representative  
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